

# Have You Met My Friend, "Truth"?

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In today's Messianic world, we see a great deal of discussion about a concept called truth, or perhaps clarified, "Truth" with a capital T. But what this is, what it means, and how it impacts a person's life and relationship with God is often defined in various ways. As certain people search to find "the Truth"—as they call it—what are they specifically searching for? What is it that people seek?

When I think of "truth," I cannot help but be reminded of Yeshua's words, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). The truth of God is something that His followers are to know, and it will make them free. It will make people free from the power of sin, free from the lures of the Adversary, and free to fulfill the calling and mission that He has assigned to each of us. The truth of the gospel is intended to redeem people from the consequences of sin, and into a new relationship with God via His Son. The truth of God's Word is to empower us for His service in the world.

Yeshua further says, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is to guide all of God's people into the truth, as the Spirit is to give a born again Believer discernment to distinguish between what is of Him and what is not of Him. The relationship between salvation and "truth" is undeniable from any cursory reading of the Apostolic Scriptures. Paul writes Timothy that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:3, ESV).

The concept of "truth," however, is not just seen in the "New Testament." Indeed, the underlying vocabulary of our Scriptures are laced with concepts that are all connected to "truth." Genesis 15:6, describing the Patriarch Abraham, is one of the most important verses in all of the Bible. We are told that Abraham "believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." The Hebrew verb rendered as either "believed" or "trusted" is *aman* (אָמַן), appearing in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), the "basic mng. to be firm, trustworthy, safe" (CHALOT).<sup>1</sup>

The verb *aman* is an important term used in the Hebrew Scriptures, because it is related to a variety of other key terms seen in the Tanach, including: *omen* (אָמַן), "faithfulness," *emun* (אֱמוּנָה), "trusting, faithfulness," *emnunah* (אֱמֻנָה), "firmness, steadfastness, fidelity," *emet* (אֱמֶת), "firmness, faithfulness, truth," and the all important *amein* (אָמֵן), "verily, truly" (BDB).<sup>2</sup> While the meaning of the verb *aman* can change slightly among the different verb stems, "The basic root idea is firmness or certainty" (TWOT).<sup>3</sup> When Abraham "believed God" it was not just a matter of acknowledging His existence; Abraham had to have a firm confidence in the promises made to him by God and trust that God was going to see him through no matter what. This is why Paul reminds the Galatians, "Look at Abraham: he put his faith in God, and that faith was counted to him as righteousness" (Galatians 3:6, NEB).

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the English concepts of belief, faith, and trust are all uniquely tied together. The Psalmist declares, "O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth [*emet*] in his heart" (Psalm 15:1-2). Only the one who can have firm trust in the Lord is he who himself "acknowledges the truth" (NJPS)—and this truth is only that which comes from the Creator. This truth is what can be relied upon, firmly believed, and confided in during life's arduous journey. As Psalm 43:3 should remind us, "O send out Your light and Your truth [*emet*], let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling places."

<sup>1</sup> William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 53ff, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Jack B. Scott, "אָמַן," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:51.

The Greek Scriptures offer us a little more variance than the Hebrew Scriptures when it relates to God's "truth," but *nothing* so significant that the underlying idea of firm confidence is skewed. In fact, *more dimensions* are added. A critical verse that should guide us is Romans 10:9, where Paul says "if you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." The Greek verb commonly rendered as "believe" ("trust" in CJB) is *pisteuō* (πιστεύω), which "denotes reliance, trust, and belief." Important related terms used throughout the Greek Apostolic Scriptures (and also the Septuagint) include: *pistis* (πίστις), "'trust' or 'faith,'" and *pistos* (πιστός), "'faithful' or 'trusting'" (TDNT).<sup>4</sup> Both Paul (Galatians 3:6; Romans 4:3) and James (3:23) use the verb *pisteuō* to describe the "belief" or faith of Abraham. But it is not just enough to "believe" in something; one must also "*be convinced of someth.*" (BDAG).<sup>5</sup>

The main term used in the Greek Scriptures (both LXX and NT) for "truth," however, is *alētheia* (ἀλήθεια), which BDAG primarily defines as "**the quality of being in accord with what is true, truthfulness, dependability, uprightness** in thought." A third, and interesting definition, which BDAG also provides is "**an actual event or state, reality**."<sup>6</sup> What this seems to communicate is that when the "truth" is talked about in the Gospels and Epistles, *not just* are the ideas of confidence and reliability communicated, but also something that is *factual*. TDNT makes the important point, "It denotes a reality that is firm, solid, binding, and hence true. With reference to persons it characterizes their action, speech, or thought, and suggests integrity."<sup>7</sup> And of course, all of us believe that what comes from God and the teachings of our Messiah Yeshua is of a Divine character that is firm in integrity.

What does this all mean for us as Messianic Believers—especially those who believe that God is restoring a Torah foundation to His people? All of us have certainly heard or talked a great deal about "the Truth" at some point or another. But I would point out that in many cases this "Truth" is not necessarily that of which the Scriptures speak. The Bible encourages us to believe, have faith, and trust in the One who is to guide us into His perfect plan. The truth which the Bible admonishes us to have is that which comes from God and is a clear demonstration of His perfect character. It can be relied upon, and we can confide in that truth when life's circumstances demand that we turn to Him. God's truth composes those principles whereby we can be a blessed people and live according to His will.

In contrast, what we see in various sectors when "the Truth" is talked about is often vague. Many people discuss that they are on a quest for "Truth," but what this is sometimes is not very clear. Are people searching for something that can be believed and depended upon? Are people searching for those principles that can guide them through perilous times? Or, are they looking for something else?

Sometimes "the Truth" with a capital T that is talked about in the Messianic world is something different than what the Bible calls us to. This "Truth" is viewed as an antithesis to "lies." Certainly, while we do live in a world of both *truth and lies*—what constitutes a *lie* must also be considered before we can describe a concept as such. There are many things that indeed are lies. But then there are many things that are probably *hastily classified* as lies, or even as half-truths, when considered more clearly are often *incomplete ideas lacking information*. When Messianic Believers have had to reevaluate common Christian concepts of the Law of Moses, in too many instances what are classified as "lies" are often those incomplete ideas lacking information. We are blessed to have access to data that Christians two to three hundred years ago did not have. Yet, many of these departed saints did indeed have the truth of the gospel, and of holy living *correct*.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Bultmann, "*pistis*," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 853.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 816.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>7</sup> G. Quell, "*alētheia*," in TDNT, 38.

Many of their teachings up to this day are reliable and dependable—just as the terms for belief, faith, and truth all embody.

I would urge some extreme caution in the days ahead—especially as our Messianic theology matures and branches out—concerning how you use the term “truth.” The truth as defined in the Scriptures is something that is dependable and factual, aiding someone in his or her relationship with God. Otherwise, is “the Truth” we commonly hear and talk about just a person or a friend whom we desire to meet? If we capitalize this term, what are we trying to communicate? *Just what point are we trying to make?* Should we not be concerned with the information that stands behind the truth, rather than forcing this concept? Is it not the *uprightness of reality* embodied by this word that is to convince others—not the word itself?

Of course, all of us at one point or another have made the error of capitalizing the word “truth.”<sup>8</sup> We have gone along with a trend, neither thinking it through nor considering what we were communicating. We thought it was our “duty” to make a point. *But does it really make a point?* If our understanding of “truth” is not substantiated via reliable data—and most importantly founded in the steadfast character of the God whom we serve—then at most our “Truth” is just a person whom we may never meet. I pray that this is not the case. I hope that the truth we can present as Messianics is more than just capitalizing a word *that needs to remain uncapitalized*. I hope that this truth is something that can guide people to a better relationship with the Lord via obedience, and will enable people to have a firm belief, faith, and indeed trust in Him!

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, our ministry made this error in several of the early editions of OIM News (2003-2004), and has learned via experience that truth is a concept that must be validated by verifiable data (cf. Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19), not just our making mention of the term.